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INDEPENDENCE.

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23 JUN 1930

BY

K. S. PIRAMANAYAGAM ACHARI.

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MR. K. S. PIRAMANAYAGAM ACHARI,

Late Secretary and Dewan - Peishkar, Urkad Samasthanam and ex-Member of the Tinnevelly Taluq Board writes:—

The resolution of "Independence" which the Lahore Congress has adopted this year stands to-day condemned by every class and every community in India through its accredited spokesmen both in the press and on the platform. Have the Congressmen who were responsible for this unfortunate resolution ever for a moment thought what its implications are and what would be the result, if the British connection were to be severed. Do they carry the masses with them, when they claim independence? Is the creed of independence, adopted by the Indian National Congress, within the range of practical politics? Is the Congress fully representative of the masses of India on whose behalf they speak and act? Do the feelings of the Congressmen represent the real feelings of the people one and all of India? To every one of these questions the answer is "No". If the Congress is fully representative of the people one and all of India and as such can claim to voice forth the real feelings of the people, why should there be protests all over the country against its Lahore decisions, as one finds them reported in the press day after day? "The title

All India National Congress is more imposing than the reality, for, so far from being composed of representatives of all interests and communities in India, it is really confined to high caste Hindus, and, further, high caste Hindus of advanced political opinions Muhamadans have always been very few within its ranks, and have never been so few as today". "Another thing to be noticed about the All India National Congress is that it is one of the most undemocratic political organisations in the world, for unlike those political parties in western countries which represent vested interersts but which have managed to make an appeal to all sections of the population of their respective countries, Congress is entirely controlled by and its policy though outwardly national, is in effect conceived in the intersts of a Hindu oligarchy". Do the peculiar social conditions obtaining in this country to which there is no parallel anywhere else in the world—the existence of castes and communities ever so many in number and as distant from one another as the poles asunder in their religious faith, their historical antecedents, their social organisation, and their customs and usages, and each living in watertight compartment of its own, warrant such a creed. If, as a result of the severence of British connection, that band of selfless European Missionaries (ladies and gentlemen) who are scattered broadcast through the length and breadth of India engaged not only in the noble but thankless task of imparting education to and ameliorating the condition of the illiterate and downtrodden masses but in giving medical relief to the sick and the suffering and taking

care of the deaf, the dumb, the destitute, the blind, and the orphans, withdraw from this country, are they to be replaced by the orthodox high caste Hindus who look upon their less fortunate fellowcountrymen as worse than dogs and pigs and do not allow them even to walk along their streets or draw drinking water from their wells. It was Justice Ranade, the political Guru of the great son of India, the late Mr. Gokhale, who said that British connection was a Providential arrangement. If India, which was once divided into a congeries of states warring with one another, with no security to life and property, inhabited by people following horrible and inhuman customs like Suttee and infanticide and plunged as it was, into chaos and confusion, is to-day—united, happy and prosperous, is it not due to Britain and Britain slone? The Hindu-Muslim riots that disfigure the Dusserah and the Bakrid festivals, the Brahmin-Non-Brahmin problem, the curse of untouchability, the rigours of the caste system all these conclusively prove the absolute necessity for the existence of a third party like the justice-loving and therefore God-sent British to deal evenhanded justice to, and to hold the scales even between the several classes and communities. Hence the utility and expediency of maintaining the Indo-British connection for ever and a day.

The politicians of the Congress school exploit the so-called exploitation of the starving masses. Let us examine this question a little deeper and find out for ourselves who is the real exploiter that drives them to the plantations to eke out their livelihood. The writer cannot, of course, speak for all India but so far

as South India is concerned, the real culprit is the heartless and greedy village moneylender If a Congress politician were to go into one of these villages and study for himself the real conditions obtaining there, he would invariably find that the rate of interest at which money is lent to these people is ruinously high—one Marakal of paddy for a loan of one Rupee for a period of six months which works out at 100 per centum per annum. It is deplorable that the little money saved by these unfortunate people after years of hard labour in plantations is not sufficient even to pay the interest alone due to the moneylender. A certain section of the Hindus simply prey upon the Depressed and Backward classes like parasites The vegetables and other products grown by the Adi-Dravidas at the sweat of their brow are carried away as presents by their high caste Hindu creditors without any price being paid for them. More than half of the people living in villages are mere drawers of water and hewers of wood to the rest of the villagers. No wonder therefore that starvation stares them in the face. These, then, are the conditions under which more than 50 per cent of the villagers live. Thus it is quite clear that the entire responsiblity for the poverty of the masses in India cannot be laid at the door of British rule. What they feel very strongly and resent is not so much the political slavery as the social degradation and the economic oppression which they experience every moment of their life at the hands of their own countrymen. In this view the writer is supported by the following observation of Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee, Editor of

the "Modern Review" made in the course of his Presidential Address at the Anti-Caste Conference held at Lahore. "In fact, as we see at present, it is easy to get the Non-Brahmin and Depressed classes to declare that they would prefer foreign domination to the domination of the high caste Hindus". So much for the much-talked-of exploitation theory.

Now coming to the political views of the leaders of the Backward Middle Class Indians or the Indian artizans, it may be pointed out that, being fully convinced that they owe their present improved lot to the benefits of British rule and having benefited by the labour of love of the self-sacrificing European Missionaries and their educational institutions, they desire that any political reforms granted to them should be under the aegis of our beloved King-Emperor and at such rate as they will be beneficial to them. They are also prepared to agree to the provision of adequate protection and safeguards to the Europeans and all other minorities indeed to the framing of "a Constitution based upon Dominion Status with such safeguards and reservations as may be necessary for a period of transition". The motto of the Indians, so far at least as the South Indian artizans are concerned will be one of "Live and let live". By this they mean that, here in India, there will be no place for a too selfish European businessman who identifies his prosperity with the exploitation of the masses and the too selfish Indian businessman who thinks that he can oust his European neighbour by unjust and unfair means, taking full advantage of a future self-governing India and passing legislation of a discriminatory

nature. In this connection, the attitude of the European Association as expressed recently at the dinner of its Lahore Branch by Sir D'Arcy Lindsay, Chairman of the European Group in the Legislative Assembly, is fully appreciated and cordially welcomed by every Indian interested in the peaceful and orderly progress of India to its ultimate goal. Let me quote here only one sentence from his speech which will speak for itself. "They must endeavour to row in the one boat of progress and break down the barriers which have been set up by both sides and to face the future with fairmind, courage and imagination" We, on our part, fully assure our European friends that political advance in India will not in any way jeopardise their legitimate interests. It is the firm conviction of every right-thinking Indian that India cannot afford to lose the inestimable advantages of the British connection, the free membership in the British Commonwealth and last but not least the valuable services of European missionaries and administrators, the former of whom are doing the work of angels in India for which she is eternally indebted. The artisan masses do not wish but simply abhor to embark on a campaign of civil disobedience with all its attendant evils of anarchy 'to achieve a state of powerless isolation'.

The writer is one of those who have the highest reverence for the saintly life of Gandhiji who has excited the admiration of the greatest thinkers of the present day all over the world and at the same time cannot but regret that his contemplated campaign of non-violent civil disobedienee might end in violence

and bloodshed, human nature being what it is—imperfect, and will, no doubt, constitute another Himalayan blunder, in spite of his efforts to select his lieutenants from the rank and file of the well-disciplined men of his Ashram and to see that they do not deviate from the path of non-violence.

India which has a message of peace to preach to the world and consistently with her tradition of high and unique religious and philosophical ideals must write a new chapter in the history of political emancipation and show to the world at large that she has won her freedom through strictly constitutional means. Let us Indian and European, Hindu and Muslim, Christian and Zorastrian, Sikh and Jain live in amity like the good children of God of Vedanta in this ancient and blessed land of Bharata Varsha, casting off our racial pride, greed and hatred in a spirit of mutual respect and helpfulness.

I cannot conclude this humble article better than by quoting the following weighty words of His Excellency Sir George Frederic Stanley who, so early in his career as Governor of Madras, has endeared himself to all classes and communities alike by his sympathetic attitude towards Indian aspirations, his wide popularity and his keen statesmanly insight. "There can surely be no doubt that cordial co-operation between Indians and Europeans must conduce to the advantage of themselves and to the prosperity of the country."

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